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LAOS



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Laos: The Communists are continuing to threaten government positions in widely separated areas, although fighting has tapered off in recent days.

In the Bolovens Plateau, Communist activity now centers on the provincial capital of Attopeu. A number of the town's outlying defensive positions have been lost and others are under continuing pressure. Reinforcements have been flown in to Attopeu but it is unlikely that the town can be held in the face of a concerted drive by the four North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao battalions believed to be in the area.

The threat to Saravane has eased somewhat, but the defenses have been weakened by the deployment of troops to Attopeu. The enemy is still in a position to strike with little warning.

In the north, the Communists have forced government troops to abandon Sala Den Dine, a village located on Route 4 approximately 30 miles north of Pak Sane. The limited number of enemy troops committed to the recent offensive along Route 4 suggests that Communist objectives in this area remain limited.

In the northeast, the Communists are making a major effort to take Phou Pha Thi, the strategic guerilla base 15 miles south of the North Vietnam border. The enemy has gradually reduced the outer defense perimeter to a point where it is within heavy mortar range. It appears only a matter of time before the enemy attempts a major assault.

Korea: Pyongyang may be trying to probe US intentions on the Pueblo incident.

Seoul is attempting to quiet criticism of the government and generally tighten internal security in the aftermath of the North Korean raid on the presidential palace last month. President Pak Chong-hui yesterday appointed a new defense minister, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Choe Yong-hui, after reshuffling top-level security officials last week. The new defense minister is likely to have a closer working relationship with US officials than his predecessor, and no change in South Korean policy is likely.

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Communist China: Official propaganda is intensifying demands that political factions end their disputes and stop the spread of anarchy.

An authoritative article in the 25 February People's Daily warned that the virus of "anarchism" is spreading to "healthy bodies of some people in the proletarian ranks." It said that if the trend goes unchecked it will lead to "counterrevolution" and will undermine the economy. As usual, People's Daily failed to identify those it blames for the present situation. It conceded, however, that they include "comrades in our ranks." The article offered no solution to the problem other than "patient" education of those "under the influence of anarchism."

In recent weeks provincial newspapers have been denouncing factional fighting and its by-product, "anarchism," in even stronger terms than Peking. They have also been more frank than Peking in acknowledging that little can be done so long as leaders are divided. A Shanghai newspaper stated flatly on 14 February that "when leaders at higher levels are influenced by factionalism... anarchism is bound to prevail among the subordinates."

In a departure from recent practice, Lenin, not Mao Tse-tung, is cited as the principal ideological authority in these propaganda attacks on political disorders. During the Cultural Revolution the official press has rarely quoted classical Marxist texts.

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Southern Yemen: The Aden government has moved again to eliminate British influence.

All 36 British officers on contract to the Southern Yemeni armed forces were dismissed without warning yesterday. They are now being held under close arrest, presumably as a precaution while arrangements are being made for them to leave the country.

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The move may be related to London's refusal to allow British contract personnel to be used in operations outside Southern Yemen's frontier. In any event, Aden's action may adversely influence the decision to renew the British subsidy, due for renegotiation at the end of March.

Should the subsidy terminate, the Southern Yemenis would be even more likely to turn to the Soviets or other sources for help. The Southern Yemeni defense minister spent more than a week in the USSR early this month. No agreement on military aid was announced, but Moscow's continuing assistance to Yemen suggests that the Southern Yemenis probably received a favorable hearing.

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Burma: In its latest amnesty move, the government has freed several former cabinet ministers and a chief justice. Ne Win's willingness to release these men indicates that he now considers their trouble-making potential negligible. The action was probably also intended to rally popular support for the beleaguered regime at a time when it is being hard-pressed by growing economic problems and heightened insurgency.

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*El Salvador: Salvadoran security forces have apparently overreacted in the three-week-old teachers' strike, rekindling a potentially explosive situation. Approximately 300 striking workers and a large number of students, including major opposition Christian Democratic youth leaders, were arrested on 26-27 February during occasionally violent clashes with the National Guard. Agitation is likely to increase between now and the 10 March legislative and municipal elections, but currently there is no indication that public reaction will lead to a serious confrontation with the Sanchez regime.

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